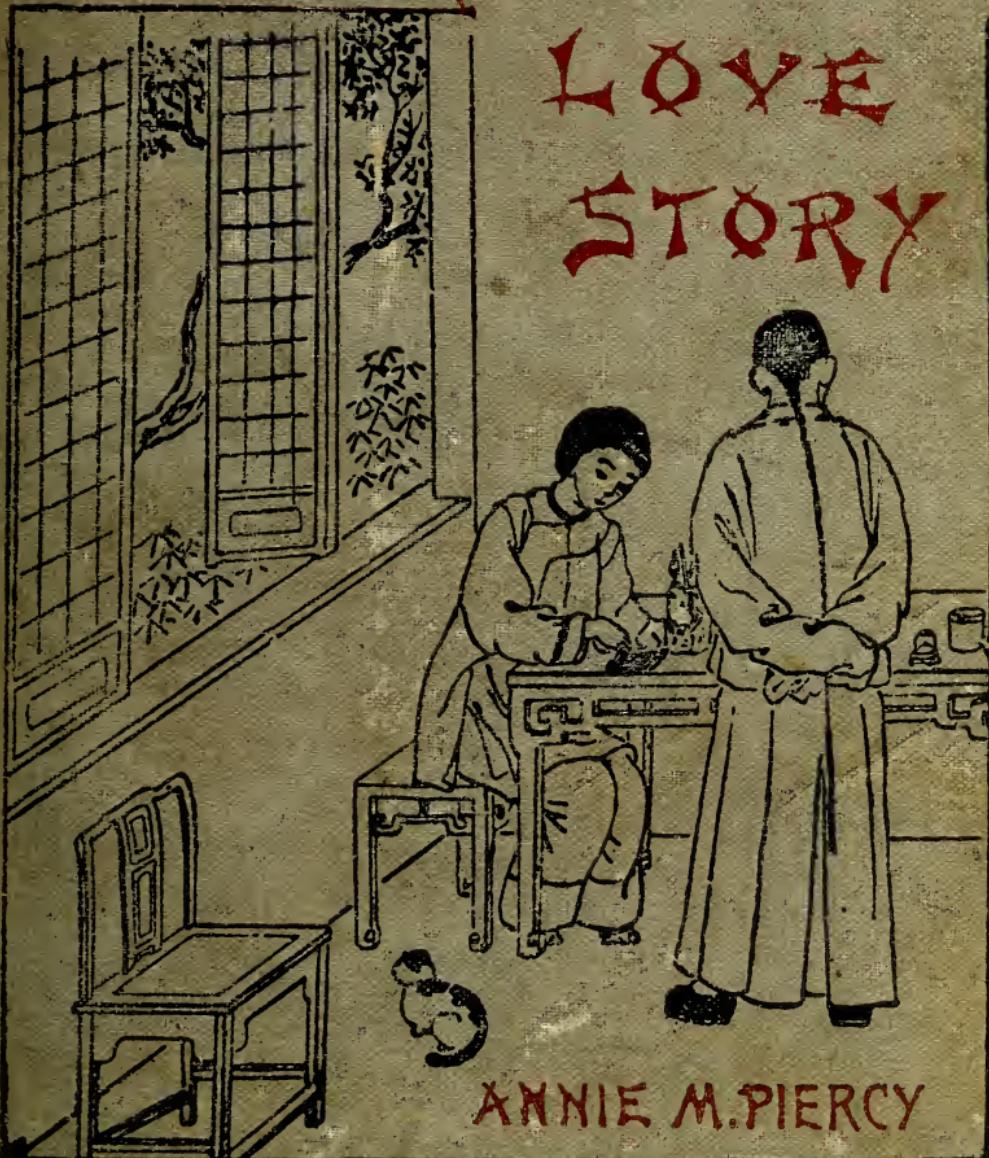


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FA TIEN

A CHINESE

LOVE STORY



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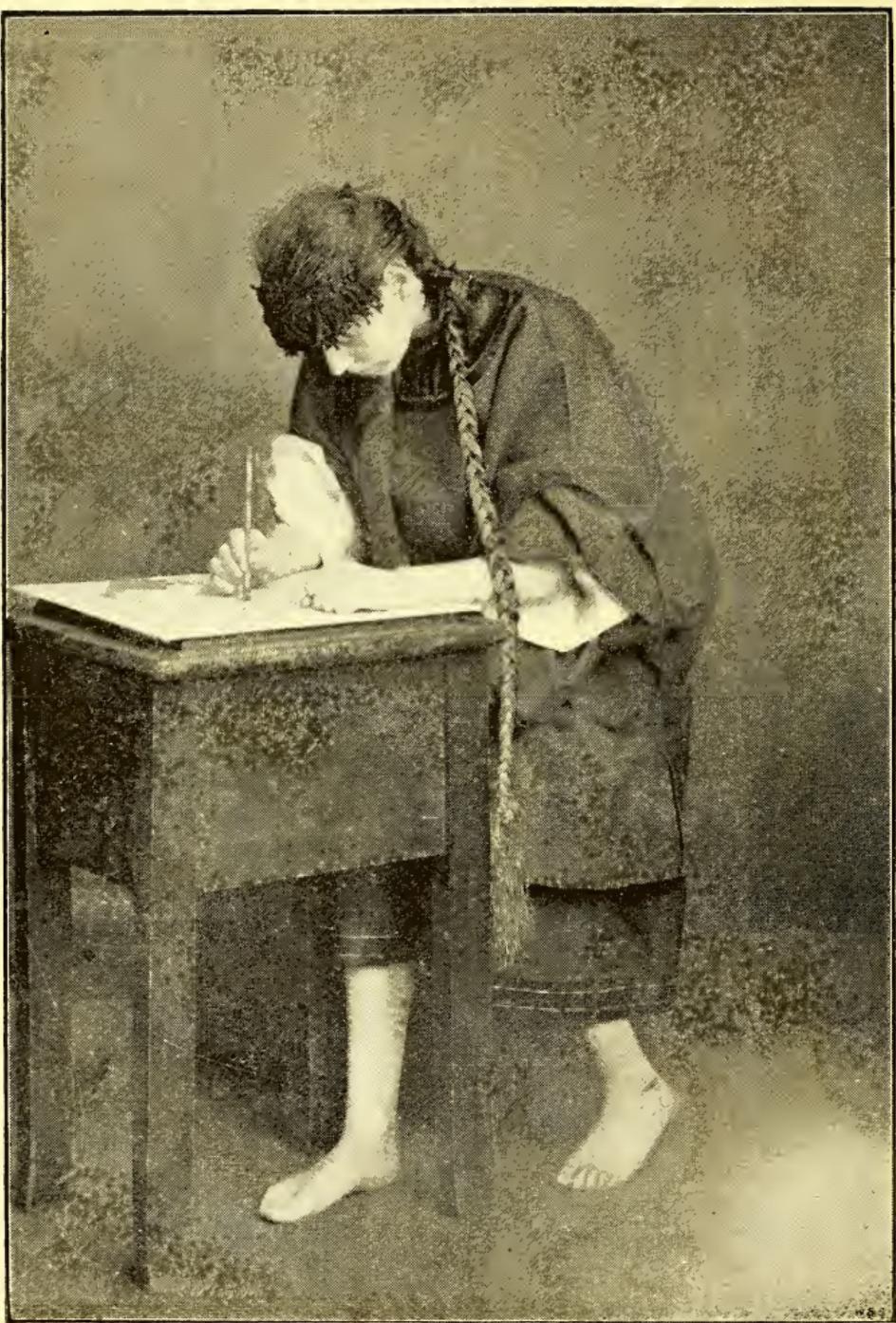
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FA TIEN:

A CHINESE LOVE STORY



"Took out pen and paper and wrote." (See page 52.)

FA TIEN:

A CHINESE LOVE STORY.



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BY

ANNIE M. PIERCY,

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Fa Tien: A Chinese Love Story.

CHAPTER I.

“**F**A TIEN, Fa Tien, come away, come in ! How well you know that you should not linger speaking with a man when you are alone !”

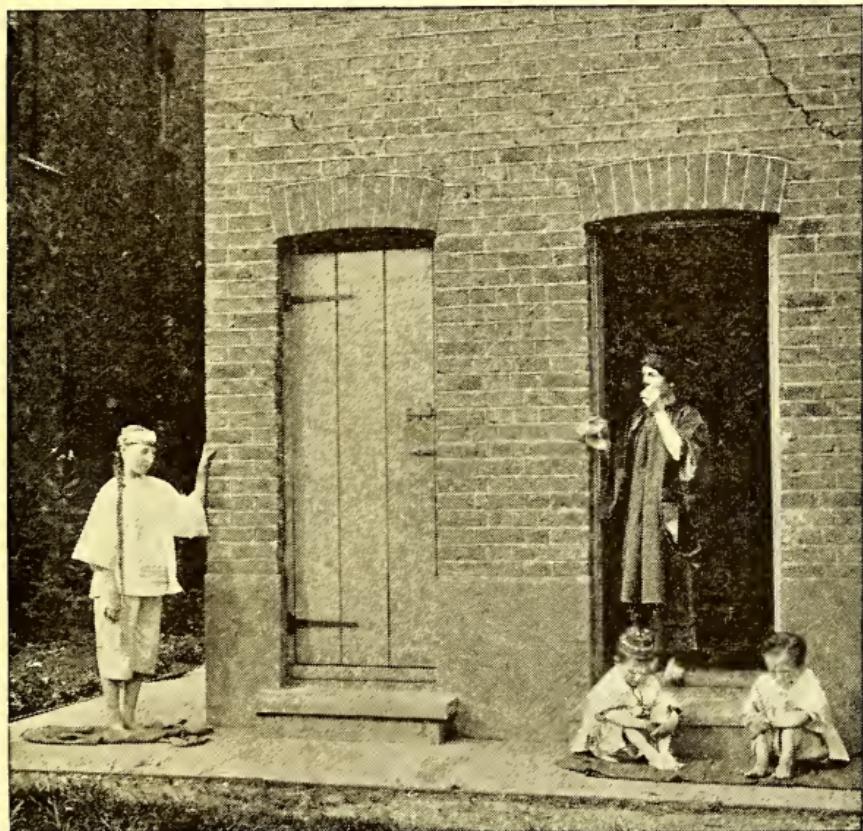
Little Fa Tien, blushing and embarrassed, ran towards the speaker, who stood in the doorway. She felt uneasy at her mother's remark, for this was only one out of many times that she had thus infringed the laws of Chinese etiquette and gone contrary to her youthful moral instincts. She was a strong, well-built

girl, with black, almond eyes, black, shining hair, and a mouth that showed some force of character. Her mother looked at her with new-born pride and admiration. "The child is really growing handsome," she murmured to herself.

Had Fa Tien been the daughter of wealthy people, only feminine eyes would have met hers until after her marriage, except occasionally those of her father ; a nurse would have followed and directed her every footstep. But she was the eldest daughter of a hard-working labourer with six children ; to help the family purse her mother must go into the ricefields, leaving Fa Tien to take care of the home, nurse the baby, and play with the little ones. While thus occupied, she was not unobserved. No high zenana walls screened her from public gaze ; from the little cottage, scarce large enough for shelter, its inmates gladly escaped into the open, for space, as well as air.

Pok A Yun was a greengrocer ; his father owned some acres of ground where he cultivated cabbage, lettuce, onions, sweet potatoes, and various herbs in which the Chinese delight.

A Yun had a conveyance, which he loaded with these vegetables, taking them round to a number of regular customers. Passing daily the house



The speaker stood in the doorway. (See page 7.)

where Fa Tien lived, he had long noticed her ; sometimes she bought vegetables from him. A Yun was twenty-three years of age ; hitherto, however, he had no wish to marry. When

he was seventeen, his mother, like a true Chinese woman, felt the propriety of seeking a suitable girl as her son's betrothed. She had placed the matter before him, mentioning at least five well-to-do men who had daughters, from whom they might select a suitable wife. A Yun, without being undutiful enough to refuse to comply, yet showed himself undesirous of falling in with his mother's wishes. The days and months thus slipped by, till at twenty years of age he became motherless. A sudden illness took his mother from earth before having the satisfaction of arranging for and completing her youngest son's settlement in life.

A Yun now commenced business, and, absorbed in the necessary labour and care involved, found the hours of the day all too short to fulfil its claims; active work in the present crowded out plans or aspirations for the future, and constant employment and a measure of financial success supplied all the satisfaction he was conscious of desiring. He was in danger of becoming sordid and mechanical.

One figure in his daily rounds arrested his mental lethargy, and aroused his otherwise

dormant soul, until, at the age of twenty-three, of which we write, he became conscious of a strange influence affecting his thoughts and modifying his previous views of life.

It is said that the Chinese, and especially Chinese *men*, know nothing of love as a sentiment. When a boy arrives at a suitable age, a wife is found for him by his parents ; and he takes her, not to love, honour, and cherish, but to regard her in future as his especial property and slave, and to treat her with indulgence or harshness as impulse or fancy may lead him. The experience through which A Yun passed shows that there are exceptions to this rule.

“Good morning, Fa Tien. You are looking well and happy.”

“Am I looking happy ?”

“Yes ; and why should you not ? You are always happy.”

“I used to be.”

“And are not now ?”

“No ; I am not happy now.”

“What has happened to cause this change ? Has your father been out of work and brought home no money ?”

"Oh, no ! Father earns more money now ; we have fish with our rice every day."

"And your little brother, is he very troublesome when mother is away all day ?"

"Little Ping ! oh ! I don't mind the trouble I have with him. He often cries ; but then he loves me after, and laughs and plays so prettily."

"What is there then that can trouble you ? I see you are becoming grave."

"It is because you come and stay and talk with me so often."

"So ! then I will not come."

"That will not make me happier, if you do not come."

"What then can I do ? I wish you to be happy."

"Go away now, and come in two days. Tomorrow you will pass the door ; but do not look at the house, you will not see me. The next day, if you will call, I will tell you something."

A Yun walked slowly towards his load of vegetables ; his mind was so pre-occupied that he forgot to call upon the two next customers ; he was deep in thought. He now remembered

that little Fa Tien had changed much within the last month; what was it made her so thoughtful? She surely had some serious trouble. And why should *he* be so deeply concerned on her account? He had known her for nearly three years; at first as a little child to whom he was wont to give nuts or an orange; but the last eight or nine months she had grown and developed an unusual grace and beauty, which the poverty of her garments could not affect. A small head beautifully poised; long, silken, black hair, plaited—as is the custom among Chinese girls—in a queue behind; a short fringe of hair over the forehead; white, regular teeth, and a deep olive complexion. He had watched her with admiration the last few months, and sought on every convenient opportunity to have a little chat with her, though so far he had no definite purpose in his mind.

Six years ago he had renounced marriage, feeling a strong repugnance to the fashions of his country on this subject; not that A Yun was highly educated, or knew anything of the customs of other countries in this matter. Instinctively he had turned from the only

customs he knew of, and as an apology to himself he said, "I am an unsociable being, and prefer to be alone." But to-day his loneliness oppressed him. His success in trade was unsatisfying ; he counted up his takings for the day; they were as usual, far exceeding his needs. Each year, since commencing business, found him in an improved position. But he was restless and uneasy, curious to know the cause of the clouds on Fa Tien's usually bright face, and surprised at his own disturbed state of mind on her account. Without acknowledging it to himself, without realising whither he was drifting, A Yun loved Fa Tien. Was he worthy of her ? Was he capable of loving and enduring, and overcoming such obstacles as must arise ? or, would he weakly succumb ? Time must reveal.





CHAPTER II.

MR. FOK had two sons. The elder, Chang, had only recently returned to his own village having been absent four years ; he was now on a visit to his paternal home.

At the city where he went to seek his fortune he entered the service of an Englishman ; being a fine looking and clever man, he gained favour with his master, who promoted him from one position of trust to a higher, until at this time he had risen to be compradore, or steward, of the establishment. In this, to him, exalted position, with a high salary and many perquisites, with under-servants at his command, he soon became luxurious. Among other vices, he began to smoke opium ; it soothed his nerves, he thought, and in the management of so large an establishment

mental exercise was continuous. Two or three grains of opium smoked in the evening procured him not rest merely, but the introduction into a paradise of fancies ; instead of the bare walls of a meagrely furnished room, ten feet square, he wandered in a palace of marble, furnished in ebony, and enlivened with flowering shrubs, its walls covered with pictures. So it came to pass that Chang returned every evening from his busy world of figures and toildom to his palace of marble, never dreaming that the stone would early crumble, and the unreal surroundings exist no longer even as illusions.

Fa Tien was of a cheerful, unselfish temperament. From morning to night each hour found her serving. Europeans living in Great Cathay call these natures apathetic. It is a common state of mind among our Chinese sisters ; they have no time to spare from their ceaseless toil for others to sympathise with their own lot. These remarks apply more especially to the large-footed and lower class of women. The writer has seen one of these women toiling faithfully day by day, and ready at any hour of the night to rise and tend the little children



"Carrying baby on her back." (See page 19.)

C

of the foreign lady, never complaining of weariness, but exhibiting a fortitude and moral graciousness that is but rarely found even in Europe ; and the testimony of the mistress lying on her sofa fanning herself is, “ These Chinese have no sentiment, no imagination, so uninteresting, so stolid.” But another eye looks and notes, for the faithful discharge of daily duty will be testified to in another tone *somewhere*.

Fa Tien was a large-footed girl ; that is, her feet were what nature had made them, they had not been bound, cramped, and disfigured in acquiescence with the prevailing fashion which reigns in China. Poverty had saved her from this infliction ; her parents had been too poor to bind her feet and make “ *a lady* ” of her. To-day found her unusually grave ; unlike her real self, she gave way to sad thoughts. She had risen early as was her custom, helped her mother with household duties, and tended the children, carrying the baby on her back. It was mid-day when her mother entered the house from the ricefields.

“ Fa Tien, my daughter, I wish to speak with you. Send the little ones out to play.”

The children gone, mother and daughter sat down on the floor, the former taking up a pipe to smoke while talking ; through the girl's dark skin the colour could be seen rising in her cheeks.

" You have been a good girl, my daughter. I hoped to have had your help at home awhile longer ; but I see it cannot be, you are growing so pretty, I am forced to arrange for you to be married, and a far better opportunity has come than I could have expected. Mr. Fu, the lead-smelter near by, asks for you as his son's wife, and I am about to give my consent. They are well to do, and you will not have to work hard as you have at home. True, you must say farewell to us all, and become almost a stranger to your old home ; but that is the common lot of women." Her voice trembled, but she silenced the weakness she was ashamed of. " I had not hoped that we could do so well for you. A Kim, your future husband, might have had a small-footed woman, '*a lady*' for his wife ; they have money."

Fa Tien made no reply ; humble though her station, she had been well trained in the virtues

expected in a Chinese girl; disobedience to a parent's wishes she knew well was a cardinal vice. The choice of a husband was no business of hers; her duty was to be submissive and obedient in their home until her parents thought fit to give her to another home, where she must do her husband's bidding, and in his absence be the slave and attendant of his mother. So she listened to the words as to a mandate finally fixed.

Her mother felt no surprise; she expected no expressions of approval or disapproval. That her daughter should feel some unhappiness at the thought of breaking away from all old associations and ties was to be expected, but that these feelings should be modified by so unexpected a change for the better was a certainty in the mind of the mature woman. She loved her child, as all good Chinese women love their children; she had hoped to avert this separation for a year or two longer, yet even to herself it was robbed of much of its pain by the exceeding good fortune that had come in its train. She returned to her work in the ricefields full of happy thoughts—joyous that her daughter was about

to be lifted into the position of a lady, that she would seldom soil her hands, and never tire her feet, that she would wear good clothes, and have her rice cooked by other hands than her own. These were luxuries the poor toiler had never hoped for ; that they should come to Fa Tien was a greater joy than if they had come to herself ; so she forgot her own loss in her daughter's gain. As to Fa Tien, we will leave her to her own reflections. This news had not come upon her without some premonition, though only formally made known to her to-day. After her mother left the house, the children still remained playing outside ; thus alone, she sat thinking of the new prospect now opening out to her and—of A Yun, who would call to-morrow.

A Yun on his return home the night before had formed a strange resolution. He must marry Fa Tien, and with her consent. Strange innovation for a Chinaman. He would not seek one of the “go-between” old women and send her to the parents of Fa Tien. He would ask the girl herself to love him, tell her he loved her, and if she evinced no responsive affection then

he would leave his own heart's desire ungratified. The evening meal being over, his father expressed a wish to speak to him on important business.

"To-day," said his father, "I received a letter from the Port of S——. It is from your brother Chang's master. He says he does not wish to employ Chang any longer, and has enclosed a month's wages. He tells me that some months ago he discovered Chang had become an opium-smoker, and that the foreigners do not employ opium-smokers, any more than do the Chinese, in positions of trust. I will read from his letter. 'Opium smoking destroys the will power, so that a man can no longer have the firm purpose that is required to walk uprightly, and to act conscientiously. I am sorry to lose from my service a useful, clever man such as your son has been, but Chang no longer possesses the sterling qualities I speak of.' Such is the sad purport of his letter. This is a great calamity to come upon me now. I am old ; my eldest son, who should have been the support of the family in my declining years, has returned home to bring down my hairs with sorrow to the grave. Did

you know that he had become addicted to this odious vice ? ”

“ I knew nothing about it, father,” said A Yun, who was almost too overwhelmed to make reply. “ I only saw that he was not so cheerful, nor so healthful as heretofore.”

“ Well, I must look to you to take the place of my eldest son. I will gather my documents together, and hand over to you the management of my affairs ; they have not gone well lately, and much money is lost ; you will find plenty to do. It is well, after all, that you did not marry ; your brother’s wife and children will need your help. Chang has started on a downward course, the end of which, as every Chinaman knows, is ruin—ruin to his wife and to his children, disgrace to his father and to his home. But no need to say more. I will leave you for the present, my son. I go to my room ; tomorrow I shall require your services. Your own little business is prospering, you can easily spare a day from it. Your customers know too well the quality of the food you supply to forsake you because you take a holiday. Good night.”



CHAPTER III.

WHAT a turn for affairs to take at this juncture! A Yun's mind oscillated between two emotions, anger and pity. He was angry with his brother, that just when to him life had begun to have a meaning and a worth, Chang should have brought this great misfortune upon the home, and this extra weight of care and responsibility upon him ; but mingling with this anger came a remembrance of all the certain results that must follow in the train of the opium craving. First, a picture rose up in his mind of what his brother was when he last left home for the city —tall, upright, broad, and well-formed, bright eyes, out of which beamed genuine good nature ; clever and thoughtful was Chang. Then followed

a vision of what he would certainly become in the future—perhaps in the near future—a shrivelled, emaciated, sallow-faced, haggard being. Can you wonder that anger readily gave place to pity towards this elder brother, to whom the younger had so often in days past looked with reverence and pride ? But among all this havoc and heart-rending, Fa Tien was present in A Yun's thoughts and mixed with his plans. She had asked him to call to-morrow, and he had promised to do so ; how could he keep this promise now that his father required his services, his father's will being law to him ? He resolved to write her a letter, but it must be in the simplest style and characters, or she would not be able to decipher it. Then it opportunity occurred, he would take it himself ; if not, well, it must be conveyed to her *somewhat*. He began to write—

MY DEAR CHILD,

You are many years younger than I am ; you will therefore excuse me addressing you thus. I promised you I would call at your house to-morrow ; if I do not come you must not think I have forgotten, nor that I am not anxious to hear what you have to tell me, and still more to see your face. Great trouble has come upon my father,



Chang as he was. (See page 25.)

and he has told me that he will require my services tomorrow ; of course I must attend to my father's wishes.

My dear Fa Tien, I want to ask you to love me. I know I am not worthy of you, but I shall never love any other. When I see you I am happy in looking at you, and in hearing your voice ; when I am away from you, I think only of you. If you say you cannot love me, then I will not marry. I will have no one else for my wife but you, for *I love you*. Perhaps you will say that I ought to have asked your parents about this, and not spoken to you on such a subject ; but I cannot follow the customs of my country. I want to ask you myself if you will love me, and if you have the *will* to come to me gladly, to be with me always. I do not want you to come and be my wife because your parents give you to me ; I want your heart's love. If you will not give that to me, then I will not ask your parents for *you* ; but I shall love you, and I shall always long to have you to be mine.

I am your faithful friend,
POK A YUN.

After finishing this letter, A Yun went out for a walk. He pondered over what he had written ; how would Fa Tien receive it ? She had already shown some independence of feeling in talking with him and allowing him to talk with her, and his presence had seemed to give her pleasure ; yet, being some years older, she may have looked up to him as a superior in age and experience merely. Well, he must wait. At that word *wait* another train of thought

suggested itself. Wait! yes, in any case he must wait; the new trouble just come upon his father would necessitate this. So weary and over-burdened, he turned his steps homeward and retired to rest.

On the morrow, Fa Tien's first thought was, "A Yun will come to-day, and at least I can tell him what has happened." She worked briskly; the idea of communicating to another what weighed so heavily on her mind, seemed, for the moment, to lift the load entirely from her—so craves the human heart for sympathy. She played with the children, cooked the rice, and gathered sticks; no one noticed that she ate but little at the morning meal. At eleven o'clock she felt perturbed; soon the well-known conveyance would appear on its rounds. At last it came. A Yun was not with it, only the boy who usually accompanied him. He came forward and stopped at her door; he was a young boy, only eleven years old. He had in his hand a small parcel; it contained the letter we saw A Yun writing last night, but it was so wrapped as not to give the bearer a suspicion of a private correspondence.

"My master told me to leave this parcel with you," said the boy.

Fa Tien was amazed ; what could it be ? She preserved self-possession and reticence, and concealing her surprise, said to the boy, "Very well ; put it down there. We do not require any vegetables to-day. Good morning."

"Good day," replied the boy, and passed on to his next customer.

Fa Tien took up the parcel and opened it ; she was not altogether surprised to find it contained a letter, as she had in the few moments since the boy appeared come to the conclusion there must be a message *in* the parcel, as the boy brought none by word of mouth. With anxious feelings she opened the missive, wondering what could have occurred to prevent A Yun from coming his usual round, and especially to-day, when he had promised her he would call. Was he ill ? What other reason *could* prevent him ? But she gave up surmising and read, first with pleasure, then surprise, then fear : pleasure that he should address her so kindly ; surprise that he confessed so deep an affection for her ; fear at his setting at naught

time-honoured customs so entirely as to appeal to *her*, passing by parental authority in the matter, and declaring that to *her* consent he looked, and by her consent would he be guided. But had not she herself been setting these customs at naught? In her own mind, silently, she had been protesting against becoming the property of A Kim. She folded up the letter and placed it carefully away, feeling much disappointment that A Yun had not come himself, and wondering what this trouble of his father's could be. In the evening when quiet came, she took out pen and paper, and wrote :—

MY DEAR FRIEND—I have read your letter. You will be surprised that it was very easy for me to read it; I have learned to read and write from some ladies who come in a boat from a distant town. They come to try and teach us a new religion; but they are very kind, and will teach anyone to read who is willing to learn. They say girls ought to know how to read and write as well as boys. I am glad now that I tried very hard to learn. I was able to read your letter, and I can write an answer, which I intend giving to you. Yesterday my mother told me what I already partly knew. Mr. Fu, the copper-smith, who lives in Tai Ping Street, has asked her to give me to be his son's wife; she told me she was very pleased at this, and intends to make an engagement with him next week, and formally promise him that I shall go and be A Kim's wife. I was unhappy about this, as I would much

rather stay at home, where they all love me and I love them ; but I said nothing, as I have been taught it is the duty of a girl to obey, and not to choose. Now I have read your letter there is something within me that tells me this teaching is not always right, and I have determined to tell my mother that I cannot marry A Kim, but that if she will let me stay at home I will work very hard, much harder than I have done, and try to be very useful to her, so that she will not wish me to be married to A Kim. I do not want the rich clothes he would give me, and I do not wish to be waited on. This is what I shall tell my mother. She will perhaps be surprised and angry ; but I *must* tell her before she promises, as when the promise is made it cannot be broken.

How can I say what I felt as I read that you (who are so much above me) should care so much for *me*, the daughter of a poor man ? I cannot tell you how happy you have made me in the midst of so much that is miserable. I shall be happy always in the remembrance of this great joy. But for your letter I should have acquiesced in my mother's earnest wish, and gone to that large, lonely house, away from all I love. How I should have longed to get out of my prison-house ! But that would have been impossible. Now I shall try very hard to please my parents. They will be very disappointed and very sorry, perhaps they will be angry with me every day, but I will bear it, for the days can never be so dull and leaden now that I have once known such a great happiness as your letter has brought me. But, my dear, dear friend, I *must* tell you that you must forget me. Is it likely when I have refused to marry the man mother has chosen for me, she will let me marry one of my own choosing ? She will think it very wrong that I should

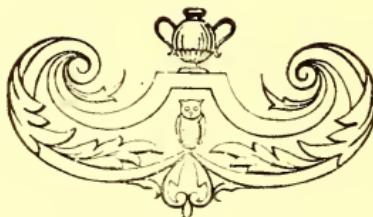
dare to have a choice, so I must remain at home, and hope that my parents will forgive me for preferring to live in poverty with them to being rich as the wife of A Kim.

Do not think me ungrateful. For many weeks the joy of my life has been that every day I should see you pass ; and often you would speak to me and be kind to the children. When you did not call, the day seemed much longer and the work harder to do. I hope your father's trouble is not a serious one, and that you will let me know what it is.

I am always

Your loving

FA TIEN.





CHAPTER IV.

AS soon as Fa Tien had finished this letter, her practical mind turned to the task of informing her mother of this new and final resolve. She knew no time must be lost. "Before many days elapse," she murmured, "mother will have entered into a bond with Mr. Fu which will be irrevocable. I must speak, and speak quickly and decisively, much as I dread the effort. Surely mother will not be very angry. She is kind, and loves me. How tenderly she nursed me during that illness I had two years ago! how hard she works for us all! how little she spends on herself! Strange that she should be so anxious to settle an arrangement that will take me away from her for ever. Poor dear mother! when she is ill, I should not be near; when she is weary and toiling, I should be sitting in

ease, with new clothes on, but with such an aching, sorrowful heart. Now if such a change might come to *her*, if ease and brightness might come into *her* life—I would pay very dearly for that; but not even for that great boon could I marry Fu A Kim. No! not now."

At this moment her mother entered.

"Mother, I just want you."

"Then I am come at the right moment. What have you to ask me about, have you not provided for to-morrow's food? I gave you the cash."

"Yes, I have arranged that, and the children are asleep. I have something else to speak of. You remember when I had the fever, mother."

"Remember! of course I do."

"How gentle you were to me!"

"You were very weak, and needed gentleness and care."

"How good you were, and how much you loved me then!"

"Don't I always love my own child, and my eldest born too?"

"And yet you are so glad to send me away from you."

“Oh, don’t ! You know that has to be done. Don’t speak of it. It is a great good fortune for you ; you will have many nice things to enjoy, beautiful clothes to wear, and very little work to do.”

“ But I don’t want these things. Mother,” said Fa Tien, throwing her arms round the neck of the worn woman, “ if you love me, don’t send me away ; let me stay with you all for a long while yet.”

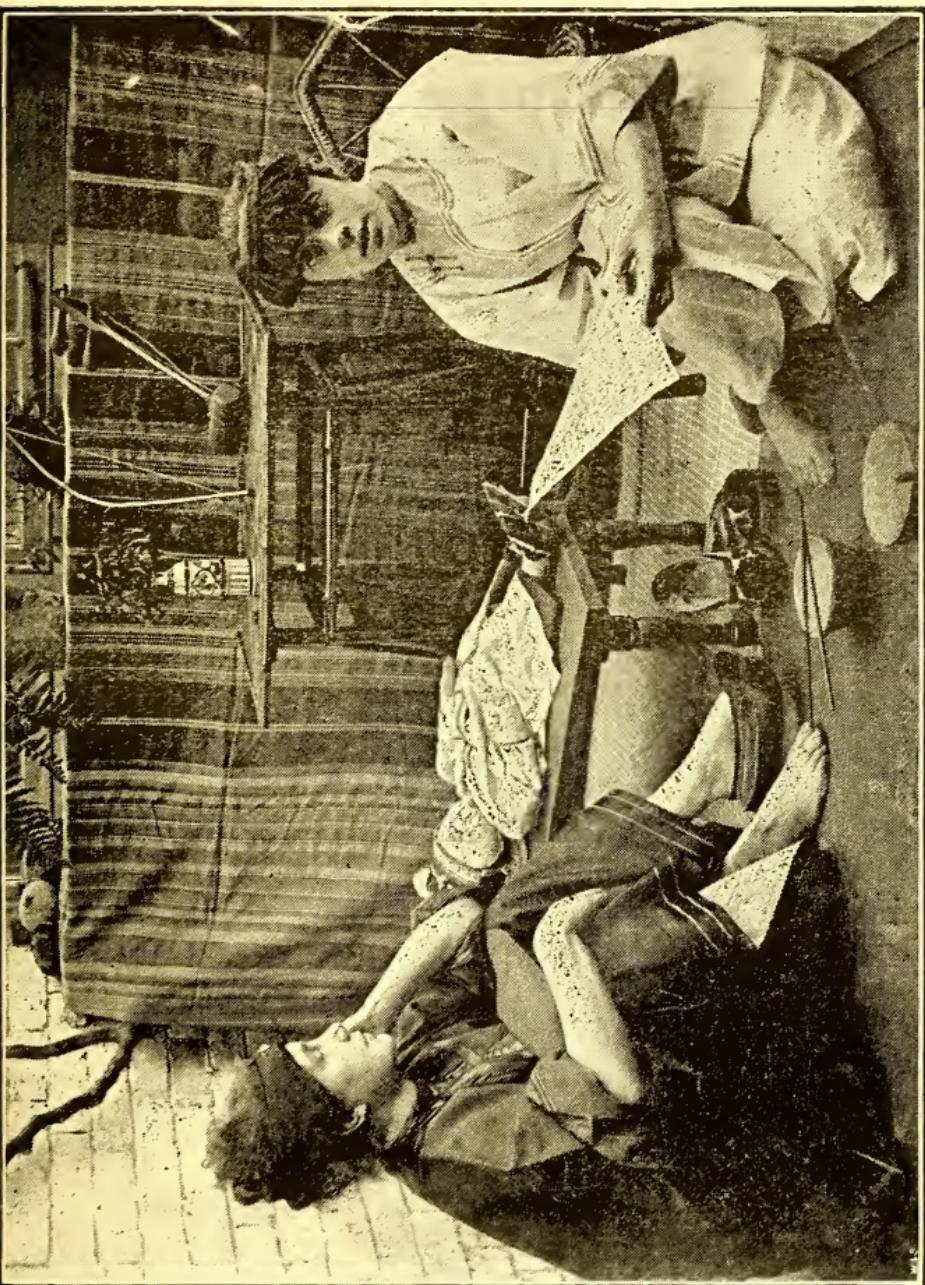
At this Fa Tien’s mother broke down, poor toiler ! Beneath the hard surface formed by poverty, and a servile subjection to custom, she had a warm, loving heart ; and in its warmest place her children were enshrined. For a few minutes she wept aloud ; then she calmed herself and began to reason out the inevitable.

“ My daughter, you are young, and do not look far into the future. I am old, and know what *must* come. To refuse to accept good fortune is to insult the gods, and they know how to avenge an insult. If we give up this opportunity for your well-being, and keep you at home, by-and-by there will be nothing left for you but to be a Buddhist nun Your beauti-

ful hair would be shorn off, you would be attired in coarse uniform and go to live in a nunnery. Leaving us thus, the separation would be still more painful ; you would have to endure a much harder life than you have any knowledge of, while the one you shrink from is an easy and flowery path."

"Mother, dear," said Fa Tien, "I have kept something back. I *must* tell you *all* that is in my heart *now*. If you are angry with me I must bear it ; but indeed I meant no evil to any one, least of all to you, my truest friend. When you told me of the arrangement you wished to make for my future, I was very sad. I have been so happy at home ; I dreaded leaving all I loved to go and be with people I do not love. But I said to myself, 'My mother's wishes must be followed ; it is the duty of a girl to obey, not to choose.' So though the indicated path was painful, I was preparing to enter it when a letter was brought to me. Since I have read that letter, I feel it is impossible for me to marry A Kim. I ask your forgiveness for presuming to object ; in everything else I will obey you, but this I cannot do. Let me read you the letter."

"I think Mr. Pok a good man." (See page 41.)



Fa Tien read on without waiting for permission ; at the conclusion she scanned her mother's face anxiously, wondering what it might reveal. Various and conflicting feelings were contending in the mother's heart ; but the one that overmastered all others was *amazement* that the orthodox rules of conventional life should be so completely set aside, that any man should address a young girl in a manner implying that she had the right of disposing of *herself*. Yet in spite of her adhesion to the customs she had been trained to revere, she had sufficient clearness of mind to detect, in the words she had listened to, the upright spirit of the writer. After a few minutes' silence she said : " He is a good man ; I've often heard him spoken of as singular, but every one calls him a just man. What does my daughter say ? was *she* pleased with this strange letter ? I thought I was to hear all."

" I think Mr. Pok a good man ; he has always been kind, and if it is not wrong—I like him very much."

" We will not talk more now ; it is late, and you are tired. Kiss me, my child. I am not

angry, but things are strangely out of order.
Good night."

While Fa Tien was writing her first letter to A Yun he was sitting alone in his room. He had passed a busy, trying day. The result of the investigation into his father's affairs showed that Chang had been wasting money, and constantly drawing from the family exchequer ; he was daily expending in opium what should have supported his family. A Yun felt his time would now be fully employed in extricating his father's affairs from impending ruin, in helping Chang's wife and children, and, if possible, in deterring Chang from increasing his daily dose of opium. He thought with regret of the step he had taken in writing to Fa Tien. "How can I think of marriage now? I ought to have waited until my father had disclosed to me what had happened. And yet how could I break my promise to call without some explanation? And half explanations were impossible in this case. To-morrow I shall be still engaged on the land, and must send the boy alone again on the round. It is well that it must be so. This is a great denial to me, but it is better so ; better

for her that I give her up, my little Fa Tien ; and indeed what hope is there for me ? If her own heart listen to my suit, her parents will still be an insuperable barrier ; is it likely they will be satisfied with such a match ? They know beauty like hers has its value, though of humble birth." So he mused.

The next morning he loaded the conveyance, and sent the boy off with it. On its nearing the little white house, Fa Tien ran out and made some purchases, then gave the boy her letter, neatly folded in a parcel, saying, " Give this to your master." On his return the boy delivered it as requested, saying, " The girl at Spring Cottage sent this ; she bought some onions and some dried lily flowers. A Yun put the parcel into his pocket ; he did not hear the boy's last remark, and scarce gave due attention to the adding of the day's accounts, so eager was he to be alone and find what the parcel contained—if only a few ill-written sentences how precious they would be ! Judge of his surprise when he saw a long letter in well-formed Chinese characters. After perusing it, he sat one whole hour perfectly still ; at the end of this reverie, he rose

like a man whose mind is made up. He had naturally a love of high moral principle ; this letter had stirred the depths of his nature. Finding pen and paper he wrote :—

My DEAR FA TIEN,—I have just finished reading your answer to my note. I cannot speak of *feeling*, except to say, my regard and affection for you will never change nor decay. I am only beginning to realise the worth of the treasure I may have so soon to resign the hope of possessing ; but my mind is steadfast as to what I must do. If it has hesitated before it cannot now. I feel certain that in the course I am about to take I shall have your approval. To-morrow evening, when the hours of labour end, I shall make my way to Spring Cottage, and ask for your mother. I will then confide to her what has transpired, the reasons for my unorthodox action, and all that is in my heart of affection for you. Besides this there is much more to tell, of which you are in ignorance, but which she ought to know before her consent is asked to a union which may probably be long deferred by compelling circumstances.

My brother Chang has brought much trouble into our family and entailed on me a responsibility for which I am ill prepared. My father is suffering from an attack of fever caused by this trouble, my future pecuniary position is at present very uncertain. You, my dear Fa Tien, will think all these references to business irrelevant to our affection for each other, but to your mother they *may* appear all-important. I say *may* ; at least she shall have full information, and I will abide by her decision. If she refuses my suit, I will not blame her ; but I cannot see you again, she will not allow it, and indeed I could not bear it. Now,

my dearest Fa Tien my heart tells me this is what you would desire me to do; it is what my own conscience commands. May the gods preserve us, and prepare us for the prosperity or the woe that awaits us.

POK A YUN.

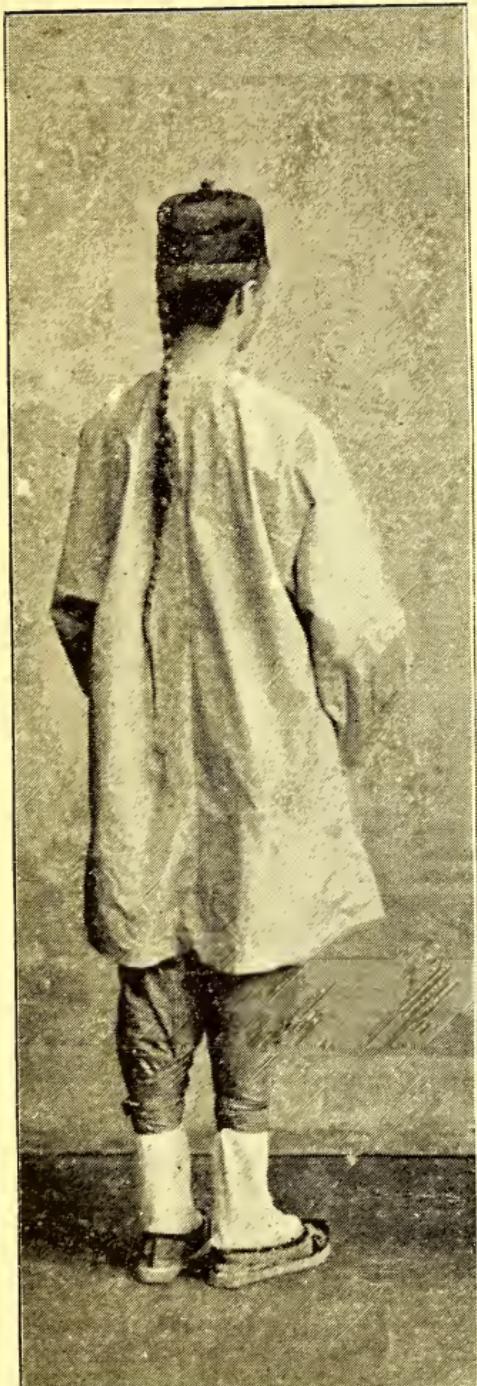
P.S.—I send this by my boy.





CHAPTER V.

EARLY in the morning our hero was attending to the necessary outdoor work connected with the farm, and looking after the day-labourers; he afterwards spent some hours in working up the neglected accounts. His father was a little better and able to give him some information which explained intricate difficulties and made clear what he, so unaccustomed to these things, did not understand. In the evening, after dressing in his best—a fine Cashmere jacket, white calico stockings, and thick soled boots—he started on the errand which must seal his fate. It was a lovely evening, a light breeze refreshed the pedestrian at the close of a summer day in the tropics; his



"A light breeze refreshed the
pedestrian." See page 46.)

spirits rose; his face, never plain, now wore the refined expression of a high moral purpose. Reaching the house, A Yun gave a firm, decided rap. A child opened the door.

"Is your mother in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Will you ask her if I may speak with her?"

It was well that Fa Tien had unreservedly confided her secret to her mother. Mrs. Ling, who had now conceived a deep interest in this "strange man," at

once stepped forward saying, "Will you walk into that room?" pointing to an unoccupied one.

"Thank you." He took the seat offered to him, and Mrs. Ling went out. In a few moments she returned with fresh-made tea and two cups.

"Drink tea," she said, in the usual ceremonious fashion of the Chinese.

"Thank you," replied A Yun.

They drank simultaneously. For a few moments neither spoke. Mrs. Ling observed A Yun critically; he was looking on the ground, and was unconscious of her gaze.

"I have called, Mrs. Ling," said A Yun, "to ask a favour. Will you be so kind as to allow me to speak fully and at length before you express any opinion on my words? You are probably surprised at my call."

He was not aware how much his listener knew; he believed she was in almost total ignorance of his interest in her family. Fa Tien had made no further communication to her lover, though she had received his second letter and knew of his intended visit. When she had confessed to her mother the weighty

secret, the loving clemency with which that kind heart had received it occasioned her much remorse at having concealed anything from her ; but A Yun's second letter came into her hands while her mother was in the rice-fields, and before she returned Fa Tien had gone to a neighbour's, and was still away.

Thus A Yun, believing Mrs. Ling to be entirely ignorant of what he was about to communicate, proceeded :

" You are surprised at my call ; you will be more surprised ere I have concluded. Up to the time I was ten years of age, and my brother thirteen, I was much attached to a younger sister. She was gentle, affectionate, and very clever. It pained me to see that she who deserved so much more was valued so much less than were the boys. Before I was eleven years old she died, but I have never lost my affection for her. As I grew older, I began to understand the customs of my country in respect to girls ; how they are at an early age severed from their own families, and made to become the property of other families without any reference to their own wishes ; I

then felt glad that my sister had died too early to be the victim of this usage. Many troublesome thoughts filled my mind on this subject such as, what sort of souls women have that they should be thus differentiated from men, and I resolved not to marry lest my life should be still more troubled by the constant sight of a being—perhaps better than myself, kinder and less selfish, yet in bondage—coming to my home, not because she wished to come, but because those who had the lawful possession of her ordained that she should come. I could not explain myself to any one, because these ideas were so strange and unlike the generally accepted ones. I feared to speak them ; indeed, I was almost ashamed of thinking them ; but I could not shake them off, they possessed me. After I had persevered for a year or two in my resolve not to marry, my parents and friends became accustomed to what they thought so strange a resolve, and left off expressing surprise and disapproval. I now found life interesting and satisfactory. I enjoyed my work, and the intervals of social intercourse with my customers were a pleasant break in my daily life.

“I have served you, Mrs. Ling, for two years. During this time I have had the opportunity of almost daily seeing your children ; a few words most days have been exchanged between me and your eldest child. But no intention was in my mind to let these friendly words lead to the loosening and changing of private resolves. The daily calls at your door, however, became the bright moments of my life ; their influence has impelled me to come to you and ask you to allow your daughter to freely choose whether or not she is willing to come and be with me for life, not as the slavish menial a Chinese wife usually is in the family of her husband, but as my companion, my equal, my dearest friend, and my best adviser.

“Before expecting your answer I must tell you that our family prospects are at present clouded. We have trouble which may end in impoverishing the farm. But as I do not make my request on the grounds of position and family status, but on character and personal affection, I will not allow that these matters disparage my offer. I will only beseech you to permit your daughter *freedom of choice.*”

"This is very startling to me, Mr. Pok. I do not say that it is distasteful, but what will our friends and neighbours say? And for my dear girl's future, oh how much I coveted the luxury and comfort I had never thought of for myself!"

"Will it be no comfort that she shall be loved and esteemed? She shall have a place of honour and command in my home; and you, her mother, whom she regards with so much affection, shall be ever welcomed and respected amongst us."

"Yes, *she* shall choose," Mrs. Ling replied."

A Yun returned home with a new joy. All the hardness and solitude had left his life; he could wait now, for the real suspense was over. Fa Tien would choose for herself, and she *could* not choose to give him up for ever. In a few days Mr. Ling sent for A Yun, and formally gave the consent of both parents to this unconventional betrothal; he, however, stipulated that until the marriage there should be no meeting between the two, and only an occasional correspondence by letter.



CHAPTER VI.

WHEN after a year's separation the marriage ceremony took place, great was the joy which stirred the hearts of A Yun and Fa Tien, and touching the words of affection which passed between them ; absence had not lessened their deep attachment for each other.

In her new home Mrs. Pok found troubles, and difficulties quickly gather round her, but her husband's affection was steadfast. Her unusual ability and strength of character were taxed to the utmost. Chang had become an inveterate opium smoker ; his body was wasted, his will powerless. His wife, an amiable but useless person, was helpless and hopeless ; the

children were untrained and self-willed. A Yun became responsible for their support ; indeed, the law of the land compelled him to take the responsibility of the family affairs, his father being completely laid aside and not likely to recover. Fa Tien took the management of the household, and by her constant industry and uniform kindness gained the esteem of all, and was called "Fa Tien the Good."

Time passes on. Mrs. Pok, with her two little ones playing near her, is preparing for her husband's return home from a journey in the country. The children are asleep long before he arrives; after he has eaten his evening meal, Fa Tien expects to hear something of his doings while away, so takes up her work.

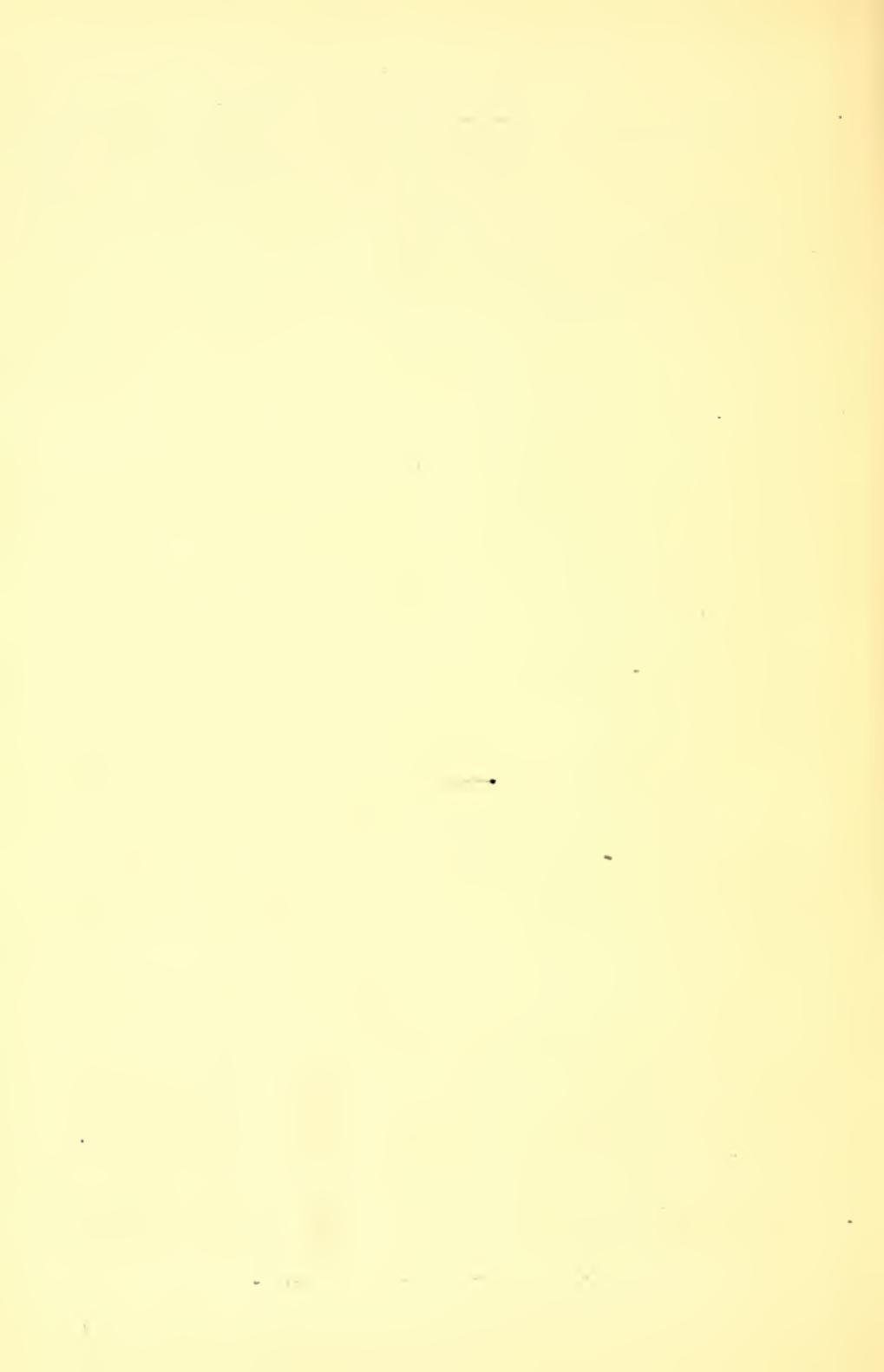
"My wife," he began, "it is long since you and I astonished people by so unusual a proceeding as to marry because of personal attachment."

"Yes, a long time."

"How was it that you, being so young, had sufficient determination to face the fear of ridicule among friends and reproach from your home circle?"

"Chang had become an inveterate smoker." (See page 753.)





“ I loved you earnestly.”

“ True ! you did ! yet, with no one who could understand or help you, and against all the teachings of your early life, that seems scarcely a sufficient reason. In a strong character like yours a sense of duty can check or crush affection.”

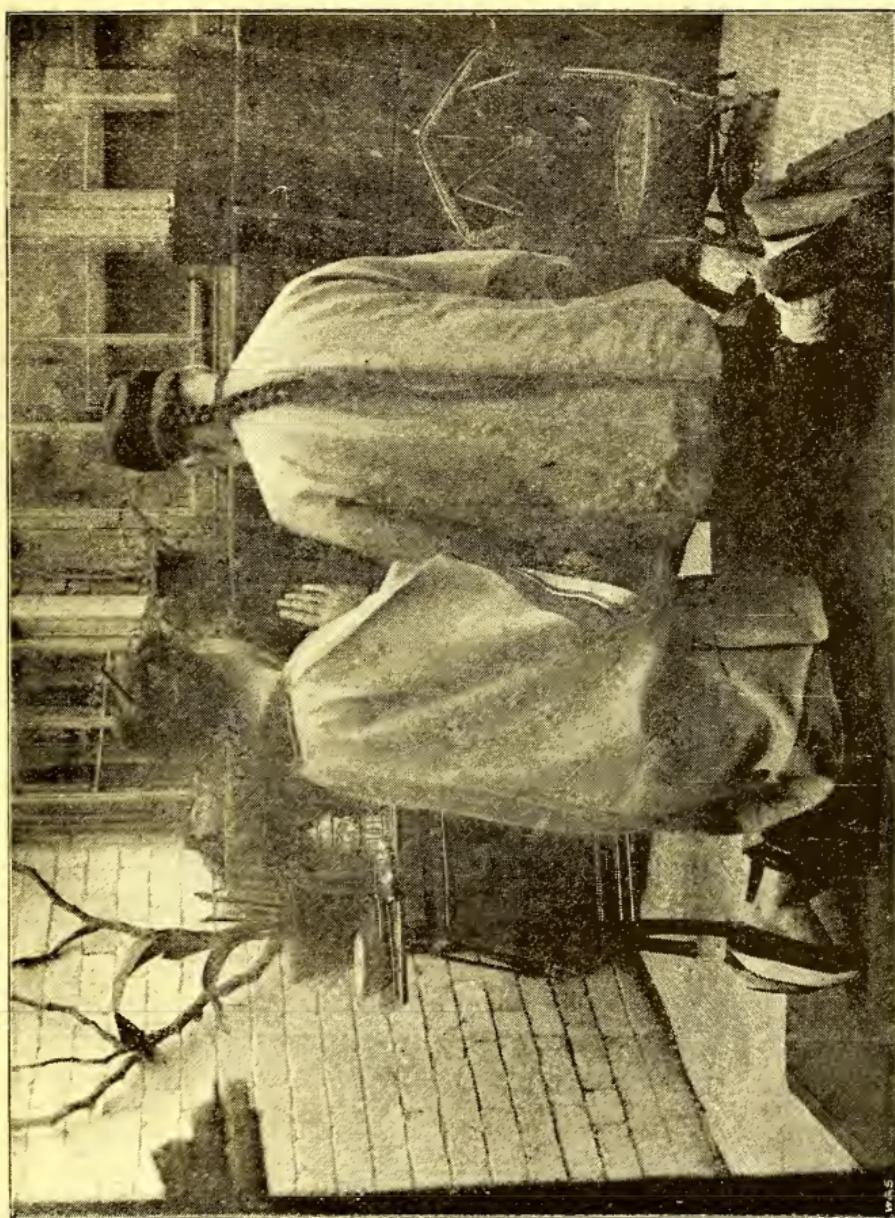
“ You are quite right, my husband, when you think a sense of duty *may* extinguish affection ; but when you say I acted against all the teachings of my early life you are mistaken. Our lives have been so filled with the anxieties and cares of others, and with the ordinary duties connected with our own little family, that we have had no leisure for discussing private thoughts. We have been very happy, always trusting each other fully, and receiving much gratitude and affection from *some*, at least of, those we have tried to serve. Yet notwithstanding the scant leisure at our command, I have sometimes wondered you have never asked me about those kind foreigners by whose instruction I was able to write you the letters which you were so glad to have ; perhaps you owe them a further gratitude. Every time

they came to give a lesson in writing and reading they talked to us about a God who is greater than any of our gods, one who lives everywhere and hears every word that is spoken. Not only need we not walk to a temple to pray to Him, but we need not pray aloud for Him to hear; He hears if we only think the words in our hearts. This seemed so beautiful and so wonderful to me, that I spoke to Him silently, and asked Him to rule my life; and He has ruled it ever since. Every day I pray to Him, and every day He forgives my failings and comforts my spirit. With His strength I held firm to my resolution not to marry if I might not marry you; by His teaching I felt this was *right*, as well as being so pleasant to my own wishes."

"O my dear wife, why did you not tell me of this long ago, so that I too might have had some knowledge of such a Being!"

"Because you were good, and did not need to know of a new god; and it would ill become me, a woman, to teach any man, especially a good man."

"No, I am not good; I am all wrong within.



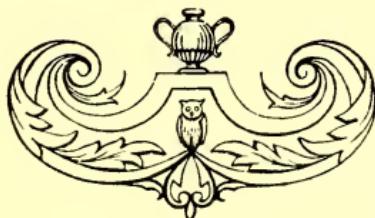
"She lifted her voice in prayer." (See page 61.)

For months I have been seeking for some god who could save me from this internal evil.

“To every god in turn
I humbly incense burn,
Yet never answer gain.”

Now let us set up an altar to this great One who has been so much to you; let us teach the children to worship Him, and we will learn more about Him *together*.”

Of all the days in Fa Tien’s life this was the happiest and the most wonderful: they both knelt down and she lifted her voice in prayer to the one, eternal, and living God, praising Him for past help and guidance, and beseeching Him to be the God of her husband and of her children through life. He heard and answered her prayer.



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